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THE NAME OF THIS ISSUE IS TALKING HEADS

an interview by Timothy White

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40 YEARS

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Inside Talking Heads

Seventeen Years of Popular Favorites and Naked Truths

by Timothy White

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Hair lank, eyes glazed, his tropical suit hung with sweat, he looks like a man who's been lost too long in the jungle. Behind him, the rest of his stray troupe weaves in and out of the shadows, suspicious of the light.

This is a band called Talking Heads. It's the summer of 1976. In the urban bush of a misspent Manhattan. The city is strapped, busted, burnt-out. The man in the sodden suit sees this. A gaping squawker whose jerky movements and disjointed words comprise a spare new vaudeville, he offers a song about the times he's groping through. He wrote it with the band. It's about a psycho killer. He and Talking Heads are performing the song in a warehouse club near Soho called the Kitchen. Their expressionless audience forms a human atrium around the musicians, straddling pillars of packing crates, legs dangling from rafters in the steely haze. These onlookers could be refugees from the Young Americans for Freedom or a midwestern bible college, so blandly prim are they in appearance and deportment.

This is but a small corner of New York City's downtown music and art scene of the late-1970s, its denizens helping to redefine the distances between popular culture and serious culture. Around them, punk music has been stealing into the vacant lot of corporate rock, throwing itself against its high, flimsy hoardings, knocking them over, pounding them into long splinters and strange angles. But this particular band, being well-educated and self-disciplined, elects to make sense of a portion of the rubble, fashioning something abstract yet functional. Neatness counts.

The lead singer of Talking Heads is David Byrne, born May 14, 1952 in Dumbarton, Scotland, the son of electrical engineer Thomas Byrne and wife Emma. The family soon after relocated to Hamilton, Ontario (where daughter Celia was born), and then to Baltimore. Music (Scottish and American folk) was frequently heard in the house, as were the tolerant philosophies of Emma Byrne's Quaker faith. David's parents encouraged his own interest in painting and music (which intensified after the Byrnes visited a cultural exposition in Montreal during his fifteenth year), and he took up the guitar, violin and accordion. Although refused a spot in the Arbutus Junior High choir because he was too "off-key and withdrawn," he summoned the extroversion and tunefulness to strum Dylan songs at a coffeehouse near the University of Maryland campus. Byrne himself attended Maryland Institute's College of Art (meantime playing violin beside an accordionist in an act they called Bizadi), and then transferred to Rhode Island School of Design.

He tired of conventional classes after two semesters at R.I.S.D., and dabbled in conceptual art. He met drummer Chris Frantz, a Kentucky blueblood. They worked together on the soundtrack for a friend's film about "his girlfriend being run over by a car." Frantz suggested he and Byrne form a band. It grew into a quintet. Sometimes the group was called the Artistics. Sometimes the group was called the Autistics. Frantz's girlfriend, student artist Tina Weymouth (a California girl), joined in.

Byrne, Frantz and Weymouth moved to New York City and got a loft together. They formed Talking Heads in 1975, with Weymouth playing bass, and gave their first concerts that June at CBGB, the leading lower Manhattan punk-rock showcase. Their name (taken from an old issue of *TV Guide*) came from the television term for a camera head shot of a speaking figure. Talking Heads began to tour New York state, from Long Island to Albany and beyond. New England too. Mostly campus gigs and small clubs.

Their music was playful but poker-faced, combining two or more simple melodic lines while maintaining the rhythmic independence of each. It sounded nervous and, because the lead singer was nervous, it also looked nervous. Swallowed whole by listeners, it felt jittery but stimulating. Like the decaying city as experienced by the well-educated and self-disciplined.

Jerry Harrison, the Harvard-educated former keyboardist for the Modern Lovers, was added to the band. He lent Talking Heads' spatial mechanics a sonic richness. They became the finest fidgety rhythm and melody brokers in rock. Reacting to hope and expectancy in a world in descent. And because of their artistic and audio-visual interests, they let everyday tacile intake determine execution. And because they were often agitated in each other's company, that circumstance became a subtle component of their sound. And each time they set out to record an album (for Sire Records) they would seemingly break up the band and re-form it with the same members.

As a boy, David Byrne had wanted to be a mailman, reading the postcards of strangers and acquaintances as he made his rounds. And that idea was also somehow incorporated into the band's eclectic intake, until Talking Heads had a whole catalog of work that resonated with the sympathetic joy of eavesdropping.

In 1988, on the eve of the release of their album, *Naked*, all four members of Talking Heads came together in the old NBC Radio studios in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center to discuss the band's body of work. Since the then-current *Naked* album would prove to be the last Talking Heads album for the foreseeable future, the interview session (and a supplementary talk shortly afterward with Byrne) represented a rare chance to experience Talking Heads reflecting frankly on their entire catalog as well as specific sources of inspiration.

In October 1992, the still-dormant group released a wistful anthology, *Talking Heads Popular Favorites 1976-1992—Sand In The Vaseline*. Besides featuring a number of *Naked*-era tracks, it also contained three new songs (including the apt single, "Lifetime Piling Up") as well as unreleased material discussed in the Rockefeller Center talk, such as "Sugar On My Tongue." All in all, what follows is bittersweet.

Goldmine: Let's begin with the *Naked* album, which you cut in Paris with African musicians. It seems to be a departure from *Little Creatures* and *True Stories*, in the sense that you've again gotten away from conventional western song structures. Was that intentional?

David Byrne: Yes. We'd done our "song" records; you get kinda bored with anything after a couple of records of it. And we decided it was time to do something else.

Tina Weymouth: I should say—because some people might get the idea that we were a bunch of white Americans just going to Paris to play with a bunch of Africans—that while we were displaced, so were they. Most of them were into a lot of different kinds of music, had heard of our music previously, and also liked a lot of the same things we liked. So we were all sharing the same kind of sensibility. There wasn't a planned thing whereby we said, "We're gonna make African music here." It just happened that this was the kind of music we were currently jamming on.

Goldmine: You've given keyboardist Wally Badarou the credit of "Chief Inspector" for his organizational role in *Naked*. Wally had a big European hit in the 1980s with a song of his called "Chief Inspector."

David Byrne: [*Nodding*] Big hit. We first met Wally in the Bahamas, where he was living and working at Compass Point Studios. He's from Africa, and he's classically trained, so he has this unique sensibility. He previously helped us on one Talking Heads record, *Speaking In Tongues*, and played on a number of songs, "Burning Down The House," "This Must Be The Place." The stuff he

David Byrne, 1979, at Asbury Park

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played on those songs helped cement them into what they are.

So at one point recently we'd talked to Wally about producing Talking Heads for a project like *Naked,* and he was too busy. But he helped us make contact with a lot of musicians in Paris. He recommended musicians that he thought we would get along with, that would understand what we were doing. It made for a really nice atmosphere.

Goldmine: In the midst of this cultural exchange, I believe there were certain specific records that influenced you.

David Byrne: Often myself and the band would listen to contemporary African and Caribbean records and they do have an influence on you. Manu Dibango's "Big Blow," for instance, helped us think of the horns we wanted on "Blind." The song "Tell Dem" by calypsonian David Rudder influenced "Totally Nude" on *Naked*. King Sunny Ade's "Ma Jaiye Oni" moved me to write "Ade" for *The Catherine Wheel* album. You don't end up stealing, you end up being inspired, which is nice. But in some stuff the theft is more obvious. *[laughter]*. An example is a song called "Belle Amie" by Kanda Bongo Man. I first bought his record 'cause I saw the cover and I didn't know what it was. He's a guitar player from Zaire, and he sings mainly in French. I think he lives in Paris now.

Goldmine:: He was a soukous musician working in a factory in Kinshasa to subsidize his career, but he had a big breakthrough when he moved to France.

Davie Byrne: *[nodding]* And his guitar playing really sparkles. The guitar tracks are contemporary; they don't sound like some kind of funky recording done in the bush. I'd put his record on and dance to it every morning. So when we were cutting a track for the song, "Nothing But Flowers," the French-African guitar player [Yves N'Djock] and myself and the drummers and Talking Heads were all jamming at the end of our song and we were playing in this style. It came out pretty naturally, and at the end they said I sounded like somebody from the old country, which is a great compliment.

Jerry Harrison: I think the process we choose causes each record to sound a little bit different than the others. *Naked* was written music, first, and lyrics and melodies, second. In that way, it was similar to *Remain In Light* and *Speaking In Tongues*. Because of that, the music flows and interweaves in a different way than when you compose songs with music and lyrics coming at the same time.

David Byrne: The music in some cases, especially on side one, is pretty *up*. But overall the lyrics are pretty foreboding and express disillusionment and anger.

Goldmine: In discussing the album's moodiness, there's a coherent subtlety that darts out again and again throughout the keyboards.

Jerry Harrison: We try to make the keyboards like the glue that holds the other parts together, because they have the ability to be more sustained.

Tina Weymouth: When we were putting the songs together, we were switching instruments, and I was playing a lot of keyboard parts after the drums were down. But Jerry got a groove happening by playing a repetitive riff that was trance-inducing. I often compare it—because I was a painter in school—to abstract painting, where the first color or line or form you put on canvas suggests what you do next. Because of the kinds of musicians that we are, and because we respect what the other musicians we play with might choose to play, there's a lot of freedom allowed for other things to happen.

Goldmine: While you recorded *Naked* in Paris, there was a two-week jamming gestation period before that. Where did that preparation take place?

Chris Frantz: That was here in New York, and it was very helpful to me at least to get my chops back, because as a drummer if you don't keep playing it's like tennis, where without constant exercise you can become totally inept.

Goldmine: Chris, are there certain songs or grooves you and the band like to jam on to find your edge again?

Chris Frantz: James Brown's grooves are always a personal favorite of mine.

David Byrne: We cut most of the tracks where Chris would be playing the kit and at least one other percussionist would be playing simultaneously; sometimes two other people. So the groove would be the result of a balance between everybody. It wasn't like—as often happens—the percussion being added on later for spice or sprinkling. In this case it became integrated.

Chris Frantz: We had quite a few different percussionists. The two that come to mind are Abdou M'Boup and Brice Wassy. Brice on the track "Ruby Dear" pulled out this instrument that was to us really great. It was a pair of western chaps like rodeo artists wear, except covered with beanpods that rattled. So on "Ruby Dear" where you hear what sounds like a huge shaker, it's actually Brice dancing with these pants on, bean pants.

Goldmine: Alongside a Bo Diddley beat.

Chris Frantz: Yes. We said to the guys, "Do you know the Bo Diddley beat?" They said, "No, no." These are African fellows. So we played them a cassette we'd made up of those beats, and they said, "Oh yeah! *That* we know!!"

Jerry Harrison: That was the track where the drummer [Moussa Cissokao] said, "I need to tighten up the heads." And he goes into the bathroom underneath the control room and starts a fire, and takes his drum and puts it down on the flame. So this smoke was billowing up through the control booth. *[laughter]*

Goldmine: So he had to temper his drums with an actual flame?

Chris Frantz: That's really the only way to do it, I guess. After that, we got them some electric heaters to use. We sprung for the heaters, rather than have the studio burn down.

Goldmine: Paris is a great international locus for a lot of cultural exchange. Another track on *Naked*, "Mr. Jones," reminds me that in African and Caribbean folklore those Anglo-Saxon surnames are always the names for ghosts, for the aliens in storytelling.

David Byrne: My thought was to take the same guy from Bob Dylan's "Mr. Jones," but now he's having a good time. *[laughter]* He's at the hotel, there's a convention going on, he's with his friends, he's not on the outside anymore. He walks into the room and it's his friends there instead of a bunch of strangers. He's getting loose, getting down, his pants fall down, he's dancing on the table, and he's having a pretty good time. He's found...

Tina Weymouth: . . .His perfect tacky environment.

David Byrne: At least for that evening, anyway.

Goldmine: "The Facts Of Life" from *Naked* could be the album's most disturbing track. It seems to be saying that the facts always fall short of a satisfying explanation.

David Byrne: It tells you that, if you watch monkeys, you'll find out that we're pretty close.

Talking Heads, 1982 (Adrian Belew is at the far right)

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Chris Frantz, 1978

Jerry Harrison: One of the things I like about "Facts Of Life" is that is has a *musique concrete* quality to it. I think it's a nice contrast to some of the more flowing rhythms on the album. It shows that we have other interests beyond integrating African music into our stuff. This song hearkens back to the more urban music we made when we began.

David Byrne: It's like a little old lady in the city, complaining about sex and violence.

Goldmine: Nothing about the Talking Heads and their music has remained the same for long. David, going back into the history of the group, was "Psycho Killer" really the very first song you ever wrote?

David Byrne: Yup, that was the first one that actually got performed. I attempted, when I was much younger, to write some songs. Gosh, they were really terrible! [*laughs*] They were like fake Bob Dylan songs. And I never finished them. That one was the first one that got finished. It was a way to see if I could do it. And we all worked together on it.

Chris Frantz: David and I had a band together, and David came in and said, "I've got this song, it's like an Alice Cooper song—sort of." He started to play it, saying "This is as much as I've got." Between the three of us we managed to make it complete.

Goldmine: Whose idea was it to add the French lyrics?

Tina Weymouth: That was David's idea.

David Byrne: You guys really helped.

Tina Weymount: He originally wanted Greek.

David Byrne: No, it was French.

Tina Weymouth: No! [*communal laughter*] Listen, I know the real story. David had asked somebody else to do it in another language because he wanted to create a split personality. He was trying to recreate a person who has a criminal mind. The people who he originally approached to do it said, "It's about a psycho killer? No, we won't contribute to that song." They were socially-minded.

David Byrne: Ahh, that's right! That's right!

Tina Weymouth: So he came to our studio where we were painting, because...

David Byrne: . . .These people had no morals, and would do anything!. . . [*laughter*]

Tina Weymouth: . . .And I knew French. So I put in the stuff that sounds like a Napoleonic complex. Then David said, "Okay, we've got this French. So what would a French band do with this rock 'n' roll song?"

I said, "Well, the French right now are really into what they call 'Yeah Yeah' music, because of the Beatles." So he put in all those "Fa Fa Fa" 's instead of "Yeah yeah."

Goldmine: Didn't you guys used to play 1910 Fruit Gum Company songs in club concerts?

David Byrne: Yeah! "1, 2, 3 Red Light."

Chris Frantz: It was a showstopper! People couldn't believe it, that song—because we had this scary reputation for "Psycho Killer." They'd hear "Red Light" and didn't know where we were coming from.

Tina Weymouth: An audience we were playing to out on Long Island at that time, I heard them talking between songs. They said, "Is this band a comedy act or something?"

David Byrne: [*chuckling*] It's a cover band!

Tina Weymouth: We often find out what really is gonna work live. You have a lot of layers of things happening, and then you find out what's really gonna serve the song. It's a shame that's the way it works these days, where you have a studio record and then try to support it with a tour. Because you're learning to play these songs *after* you've made the record! It would be best to tour first with new material and then record it—but nobody wants to hear the new material, they always wanna hear the old stuff.

David Byrne: I think Elvis Costello tried that, doing dates with all-new material to break it in. It's tough to do, because an audience that has no familarity just sits there and *listens.*

Chris Frantz: It's like if the Who doesn't do "My Generation."

David Byrne: Yeah, it becomes a courageous act to do this.

Goldmine: You performed a rare but memorable song during 1977 called "Sugar On My Tongue."

David Byrne: [*laughter*] It has a little bit of innuendo in it, you might say. It went, "Is she gonna put sugar on my tongue/Is she gonna gimme gimme some/She put it right there on my tongue."

Chris Frantz: It was highly suggestive, and it was recorded by fans on cassette machines in clubs.

Goldmine: Another Talking Heads rarity is "Love Goes To A Building On Fire," which was a limited edition B-side.

Tina Weymouth: It's out-of-print and it was never put on any of our albums. I think it demonstrates that even when we were a three-piece and had never made many recordings, we were already thinking of expanding our sound.

Goldmine: Good point. It's got horns on it, just as "Naked" does.

Tina Weymouth: Yes, and when we first put it out, our fans from CBGBs were *shocked.* Because we'd always been labeled as minimalists. That was one of the reasons we threw the wrench in with the bubble gum music. We were considered serious, dramatic, minimalist artists. And we were trying to move away from that kind of label. We just didn't want to be categorized.

Jerry Harrison, August 10, 1979, at Central Park in New York City

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Goldmine: David, you joke about being a cover band, but you got your first Top 30 hit in 1978 with Al Green's "Take Me To The River." What made you decide to cover that song?

David Byrne: Chris and I, while we were in this band in Rhode Island, we had done another Al Green song, "Love And Happiness." [*grinning*] I can't imagine what that sounded like, now, because it's this very sensuous, dreamy kind of song and very difficult to sing. I must have mangled it terribly.

Chris Frantz: We did the song a lot, and people really liked it, but I don't think they had any idea that it was a soul song. This was the "Disco Sucks" days, and anything that had a remotely sexy syncopated beat to it was pretty much taboo. Everything was punk: straight and preferably fast. So we played "Take Me To The River" to shake people up a little bit. We were a little bit leary about doing it, even though crowds liked it, because the emphasis is always on doing your own material.

Jerry Harrison: I had never heard "Take Me To The River" before we worked that out for the record. I had never listened to it.

David Byrne: Al Green's version?

Jerry Harrison: That's right, or Syl Johnson's. So you guys just showed me the chords and I started playing. One of the reasons it sounds different is that I was taking it through your understanding of it, and then adding my understanding and not trying to cop anything from the original records.

Goldmine: "And She Was" sounded like a Buddy Holly song for the 1980s, with a modern-sounding aura of abandon. How was that conceived?

David Byrne: That was written in the old style, the way I imagine Buddy Holly or someone like that would have written a song. It has the "La Bamba"-type chorus.

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Tina Weymouth: David came to us, as he did with all the songs from the *Little Creatures* and *True Stories* albums, with demos on which he had himself playing guitar and singing to a beat box. We put in our parts as we saw fit.

Chris Frantz: I put in the "Cherry, Cherry" guitar. So it isn't just Buddy Holly and "La Bamba" in there. There's also some great Neil Diamond. [*laughter*].

Goldmine: David, you've told me that a song called "Left Right Salute No. 4" by African artists Shasha and Jackey was an influence on at least one tract on the 1979 *Fear Of Music* LP.

David Byrne: The Shasha and Jackey song is from a record I think was South African called *17 Mabone,* which I picked up in a store in New York. I bought it because the cover had a drawing of a car with 17 headlights on it. This was one of the first records I'd heard that was of people from another culture playing music out of their traditions but using electric instruments. They're not trying to imitate the Beatles or the Temptations or whatever.

I was fascinated by the guitar style and tried—and failed—imitating it in a Talking Heads song, "I Zimbra." When we recorded that track we could never get any lyrics to it, so we ended up using the words of this nonsense Dada poem written around 1915 or 1920.

Goldmine: There's a Cajun feel to parts of the *Little Creatures* album. What might have triggered that songwriting direction?

David Byrne: Clifton Chenier's "Eh Tite Fille" shows a bit of what wound up on "Road To Nowhere" from *Little Creatures.* We used an exotically flavored accordion like Clifton's on that song. When you're down in Louisiana, you can go to a local bar or club and hear a band playing this kind of stuff. Although the lyrics of the song might sound depressing, we wanted it to have an upbeat feel—like everyone's exuberant and joyous about their imminent demise. [*laughter*]

Goldmine: *True Stories* in 1986 drew from a number of sources for ideas and composing catalysts, some of them Louisiana-based, right?

David Byrne: Yes. The Staple Singers' "Oh La Da Da" was a partial inspiration for "Puzzling Evidence" on *True Stories.* Pop Staples is the sire of the group, and the other singers are his daughters. They're basically a gospel group that makes secular recordings—but only if the material has a wholesome message. At one point I got this phone call and they wanted to do a version of one of our songs, "Slippery People." I got to meet Pop when they recorded our song.

Later, when I was doing the movie *True Stories,* among the people who came up as possibilities to play one of the characters was Pop. I'd written a song, "Papa Legba," that was basically about a healer who used voodoo and Catholic saints and African things all mixed together—as happens a lot in Texas, Louisiana, that part of the country.

In the film, the character I wanted Pop to play was a force for good, helping another man to find his wife. He wasn't casting evil spells, but he was having to sing this song about Papa Legba, who was the African god of the crossroads. It was a great loss to me that we never got to release the version of "Papa Legba" that Talking Heads did with Pop, which was blues-based gospel with a little Latin flavor.

David Byrne: The song was a popified version of the Mardi Gras songs and chants they do. The Tchoupitoulas are some of the black Indians of New Orleans. These are not Native Americans. I heard one story that this musical tradition came about because during slavery days in that part of the country, the black people were forbidden to dance and make their own music. One way around this was to form these social groups and say they weren't black, they were Indians. So it became a Mardi Gras tradition. On "Hey Now," the children singing were backed up by the Neville Brothers on

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Byrne in 1983

instruments and backing vocals.

Goldmine: Tina, you and Chris are completing another Tom Tom Club album, but you've also just finished producing Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers' *Conscious Party* album.

Tina Weymouth: That was a thrilling experience for us. We were only sleeping just a couple of hours a night because of the work load, and we still felt good. Yet in many ways it started through a tragedy.

A mutual friend, Alex Sadkin, who engineered and co-produced *Speaking In Tongues,* was going to produce the album for Ziggy and the Melody Makers, as he had a couple of Bob Marley's records. Alex had the reggae sensibility as well as their trust, which is really important. But then something really terrible happened: Alex was killed in a car accident. It was upsetting news for all of us.

Later on, Ziggy's record company called us up and said, "Look, we really like your Tom Tom Club stuff. Would you be interested in taking Alex's place?" We thought about it, and decided we were interested, but we wanted to meet the group first. So we met them in New York last October at an Indian restaurant and we looked each other over. Ziggy is 19 but he was 18 at that point last October. Ziggy's comment afterward was, "By the way, is he gonna bring his *wife* to the studio?"

Chris Franz: [*grinning*] Obviously, we were just getting to know each other at that point. So anyway, we went down to Reggae Sunsplash in Jamaica to see the Melody Makers perform and we sealed the bargain there. Ziggy said, "Yeah, we can do a few songs!" A few songs turned into 13 and we were delighted.

Tina Weymouth: It blew our minds to watch this kid in the studio. He's a natural singer and can ad-lib like nobody's business. And he has that spiritual, poetic, prophetic vision that his father had.

It was so weird to us at first, because the first thing we thought was, "He sounds so much like Bob Marley!" But the thing that frequently struck us from time to time during the recording in Kingston was how often it felt like Bob was there too—not as any influence but as this benign *presence.* There were moments throughout the project when we'd all get tired or run up against a dilemma, or encounter a snag or a technical problem—and then suddenly a magical thing would happen.

This greater spiritual intervention would occur, a force that solved things, and all of us would spontaneously agree it was Bob there amongst us again, helping us out. I believe Bob Marley's spirit is powerful and good enough to have that kind of effect, whether on Ziggy and us or others.

Goldmine: Speaking of the presence of spir-

its of various sorts, we should also talk about Jerry's superb second solo album *Casual Gods*.

Jerry Harrison: The album was recorded over the course of a few years. I was always being interrupted to do other production work, for the Violent Femmes or the Fine Young Cannibals, and I'd have to stop to take on these assignments. But those distractions somehow brought a lot of variety to the material, and enough of my original ideas endured to provide overall consistency to my record.

Goldmine: I notice that Ernie Brooks, a colleague from your days with the Modern Lovers, was involved as assistant producer.

Jerry Harrison: That's right. I'm putting a band together with Ernie on bass that starts touring in a week! Others in the band are guitarist Alex Weir and keyboard player Bernie Worrell, both of whom were part of the band for our *Stop Making Sense* film. So it's the old gang together again.

Goldmine: "Rev It Up" from *Casual Gods* has become a college radio favorite.

Jerry Harrison: Yes, and I understand that the people from the *Moonlighting* TV show heard it, and are about to use it for a scene in an upcoming episode where someone is stripping!

Goldmine: "A Perfect Lie" is another sexy song on the album.

Jerry Harrison: The idea of "A Perfect Lie" is that you're making love to your girlfriend and she suddenly is a much better lover. This is after you'd been away for a while on a trip or whatever. So you have these twin feelings of excitement and wondering, "Where did she learn this? Who else is involved?" It's a funny *position* to be in. [*communal laughter*].

Goldmine: Regarding strange positions, David, I know that you worked with two Asian composers, Cong Su and Ryuichi Sakamoto, for your Oscar-winning soundtrack to the film *The Last Emperor*. Were you three surprised to be sharing the assignment?

David Byrne: Bernardo Bertolucci, the director of *The Last Emperor*, was putting out feelers to see who would be interested in the project. I think what happened was, because of short notice, neither Ryuichi nor Cong had time to score the whole project--which worked out for the best. So we were assigned different scenes by the director. At the time, Ryuichi was fascinated by Hitchcock movie scores, and I was delving into Chinese music as thickly as I could.

Oddly enough, the stuff I wrote was very Chinese-sounding, and the stuff Ryuichi and Cong did was very much in the way of an epic American movie score!

Goldmine: Listening to the soundtrack, I'm interested in the stringed instruments on "The Main Title Theme," which you wrote. What am I hearing in the foreground?

David Byrne: [*smiling*] It's a very good violin player in London imitating Chinese stringed instruments. I was mixing western instruments with Chinese instruments, and sometimes the mix was really successful, but sometimes the tuning of the Chinese instruments is so different that I had to substitute western instruments playing Chinese scales.

I got a notice the other day that a Chinese pop singer has written words to this music and is going to do a vocal version. Here I am, imitating Chinese music in what must be the sincerest form of flattery, and now the Chinese are imitating this imitation Chinese music! [*laughter*] To me, it's just great that music and ideas can go around the world like that.

Goldmine: You'll shortly be releasing *Beleza Tropical*, the first of a series of albums your're sponsoring that compile some of the best of modern Brazilian pop. How did you fit that in?

David Byrne: I've been listening to Brazilian music for quite a while. I just loved it, and I thought, "How can I get more poeple to hear this?" It's a personal mission, because I think if they hear it they'll go, "Oh, this was something missing in my life."

So I've put together an introductory package called *Beleza Tropical*, which means "tropical beauty," and it features a lot of the big stars in Brazilian pop music who mainly came up in the late 1960s and early 1970s and revitalized Brazilian pop music: Gilberto Gil, Milton Nascimento, Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso.

These people picked up electric guitars and drums from American and European pop music, played them Brazilian-style, and created something entirely new. A lot of Brazilian music has African rhythms and sensibilities woven into it. But the blend and the way they've melded them down there are very different than the way they have in America, Cuba and Trinidad—other places where the slave trade brought African culture to this side of the Atlantic.

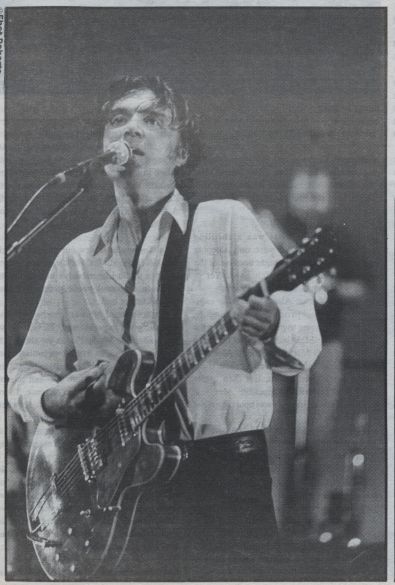
Goldmine: When one first hears this music, it could be misperceived as merely pretty, middle-of-the-road pop, but actually it has a very serious intent and was quite controversial in Brazil.

David Byrne: [*Nodding*] It's hard to imagine that songs as pretty as these could feel threatening to anyone, and it's the same way with a lot of South African pop. It just sounds incredibly buoyant and exuberant.

So, it's difficult to imagine this as protest music, but in a lot of Brazilian music, the social criticism is so subtle. It's in the wordplay, in the whole attitude, in the *decision* to make the music. But this music inspired an entire generation in Brazil, and these singers became icons and heroes.

Goldmine: Some of these artists were even driven into exile.

Byrne, solo, in 1992



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Talking Heads, 1988

David Byrne: Yeah, Caetano was thrown in jail for a while, and he and Gilberto moved to London. At the moment, Gilberto is running for mayor in the city of Salvador in Brazil.

Goldmine: David, you also did a recent film score project with the first lady of salsa, Celia Cruz.

David Byrne: Celia Cruz was always one of my idols. She's incredibly popular, and can sell out Madison Square Garden, yet the Latin music and the pop music world have been pretty separate. Jonathan Demme, the director of *Something Wild*, asked me to do a title tune for that movie, and I said I would if I could do it as a duet with Celia Cruz. I thought that would give the song a feeling of two different sides of Manhattan.

I don't think she ever heard of me, but she was up for it. I wrote the song with Johnny Pacheco, another great Latin star. So we cut the music tracks and then Celia came in to sing. She's not a young woman, but her voice was knocking me across the room! The song talks about Manhattan as being a woman. She can drive you crazy, but crazy for love, too.

Also, there's a vamp at the end of the song, right at the point where it gets steamrolling, that has some of the same kinds of chord changes as "Wild Thing," the Troggs' song. Meantime, she's singing part of a similar song of hers, "Ay Mi Cuba." It's hard to believe it could all fit together, but near the end you could almost sing one song on top of the other. They merge! I love salsa, and I plan to do more with it.

Goldmine: It's rather modest and generous of you to openly acknowledge the debt you and Talking Heads have to so many other musicians.

David Byrne: Well, it's important to remember that none of us works in a vacuum. Hopefully, talking about the creative ties to all these other artists will encourage fans to go out and get their music too.

Our whole discussion represents only a small sample of the music that's had a real effect on my music and Talking Heads' music. And, we hope, vice versa.

[smiling] This conversation is the same as having friends over to our house and us saying, "Sit down, I've gotta play you this thing I've discovered!"

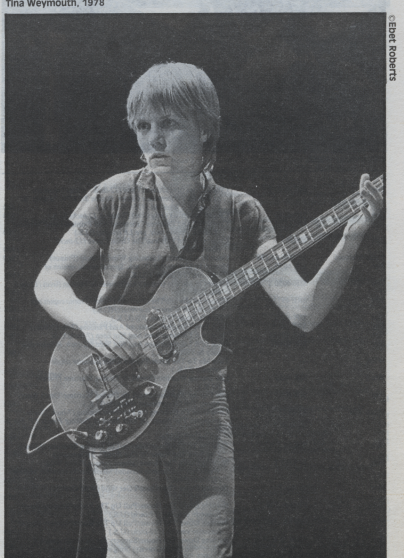
Talking Heads Complete Discography

compiled by the ARChive of Contemporary Music

Talking Heads
Singles

		Psycho Killer/Pulled Up *(PS, no label)* (U.S.)
Sire	6078-620	Pulled Up/Don't Worry About The Government *(PS)* (U.K.)
Philips	6078 520	First Week/Last Week. . .Carefree/Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town *(7-inch)* (Holland) 1977
ABC/Sire	SAA737	Love Goes To Building On Fire/New Feeling *(7-inch, "New Feeling" is different than LP version, recorded before Jerry Harrison joined the band)* (U.S.) 1977
Sire	6078.604	Love Goes To Building On Fire/New Feeling *(7-inch, PS, Same "New Feeling" as U.S.)* (U.K.) *1977*
Sire	*6078.610*	*Psycho Killer/Psycho Killer (acoustic) (7-inch & 12-inch, PS)* (U.K.) 1977
Pathe Marconi	2C008-61840	Psycho Killer/Psycho Killer (acoustic) *(7-inch)* (France) 1977
Sire	6078 610	Psycho Killer/Psycho Killer/I Wish You Wouldn't Say That *(12-inch)* (Belgium) 1977
Philips	6078 518	Psycho Killer/Pulled Up *(7-inch)* (Holland) 1977
Sire	6078 620	Pulled Up/Don't Worry About The Governement *(7-inch)* (U.K.) 1977
Sire	SRE 1002	Uh-Oh Love Comes To Town/I Wish You Wouldn't Say That *(7-inch, PS)* (U.S.) 1977
Sire	SAM 87	Love Goes To Building On Fire/Psycho Killer *(7-inch. With Sire #SIR-4004, special limited edition double 7" gatefold picture sleeve, includes Talking Heads history and drawing by Peter Frame)* (U.K.) 1978
Sire	SRE 1013	Psycho Killer/Psycho Killer (acoustic) *(12-inch, PS)* (U.S.) 1978
Sire	SRE 1032	Take Me To The River (edit)/Thank You For Sending Me An Angel (version) *(7-inch. Some US and foreign editions have the timings reversed, "River" should be "3:36," "Thank You," 2:11)* (U.S.) 1978
Sire	SIR-4004	Take Me To The River/Found A Job *(7-inch. With Sire #SAM 87, special limited edition double 7" gatefold picture sleeve includes Talking Heads history and drawing by Peter Frame)* (U.K.) 1978
Sire	PS-1032	Take Me To The River/Thank You For Sending Me An Angel *(7-inch)* (U.S.) 1978
Sire	100317	Take Me To The River/Thank You For Sending Me An Angel *(7-inch)* (Germany) 1978
Sire	SRKS 601B	The Good Thing/Found A Job *(7-inch)* (Holland) 1978
Sire	SFL-2455	Air/I Zimbra *(12-inch. PS)* (Japan) 19797
Pathe Marconi	2C008-63307	Houses In Motion/Air *(7-inch. Special remix version of "Houses In Motion")* (France) 1979
Sire	PRO-A-846	I Zimbra/Air/Life During Wartime *("I Zimbra" remixed and edited by Brian Eno)* (U.S.) 1979
Sire	SRE 49075	Life During Wartime/Electric Guitar *(7-inch. Have also seen this listed with the # SIR-4027)* (U.K.) 1979
Sire	SIR-4027	Life During Wartime/Electric Guitar *(7-inch, PS)* (U.K.) 1979
WEA/Sire	SAM-108	Psycho Killer (live)/New Feeling *(7-inch. Promo included with UK red Fear of Music, sticker on LP says "Contains Free Single — Psycho Killer Live")* (U.K.) 1979
Sire	7PP-23	Born Under Punches (The Heat Goes On)/Cities (live) *(7-inch)* (Japan) 1980
Sire	SIR 4040	Cities/Cities (live) *(7-inch. Picture sleeve, live side from Berklee Performance Center, 8/24/79)* (U.K.) 1980

Tina Weymouth, 1978



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